

Fact checking on SCHEER opinion

IARC classified all UV radiation as carcinogenic. But the WHO itself has come to the conclusion that the “relative additional risk” of getting skin cancer due to UV exposure is 61% for the sun and only 16% for sunbeds. IARC also considers red meat carcinogenic with the additional risk of getting cancer put at 18%. Yet, this has not triggered any scientific opinion demonising a moderate consumption of meat!

1. As of today, there is no study that proves a link between sunbed use and skin cancer.
2. Even the studies that allege a link see no statistically significant risk (+6%) from the use of professional sunbeds (i.e. those in tanning salons). The figures used by SCHEER are an amalgamation of the additional risk from home-use devices (+40%), professional sunbeds (+6%) and medical “phototherapy” sessions – using much stronger UV lamps (+96%).
3. Sunbeds have evolved over time. Today's devices respond to the applicable standards, emit much less UVR than those from the early days, and allow for a controlled use that ensures safety.

FALSE: There is no evidence quoted in the opinion supporting this statement.

As « may » suggests, it is impossible to attribute these cases to the use of sunbeds. Most patients with skin cancer have exposed themselves to the sun much more than they ever used sunbeds, and other risk factors (e.g. genetic predisposition) also play a role. Sunbeds are just an easy target.

It has been demonstrated that a tanned skin has less chance to get burned (sunburn, especially at a young age, is considered a major risk factor for developing skin cancer later in life).

**Go for the glow or ban the tan?
Is it safe to use sunbeds?**

This is not a new issue. Already in 2006, the Scientific Committee on Consumer Products provided an Opinion on the biological effects of ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from sunbeds. There, it was stated that using UVR tanning devices was likely to increase the risk of malignant melanoma of the skin and possibly other melanoma. It was recommended for young people under 18 years to avoid sunbeds. A few years later, in 2009, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified the use of UV-emitting tanning devices as carcinogenic to humans. In light of new evidence, the European Commission asked the Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER) to update the previous Opinion on this topic.

→ ARE MANY CASES OF SKIN CANCER ATTRIBUTABLE TO SUNBED USE?

In Europe, almost 500 women and 300 men may die each year from a melanoma as a result of sunbed use. The increase in melanoma risk associated with sunbed use in the general population is significant. It is more than 15%, with most of the risk concentrated in the population who started using sunbeds before the age of 35 (+75%). This risk increases proportionally with the number of and frequency of sessions.

→ IS EVERYONE AT RISK, OR ONLY VERY FAIR AND SUSCEPTIBLE PEOPLE?

Although sunbed use is inadvisable for anyone, people who are fair or who have freckles, atypical or multiple moles or a family history of melanoma should particularly avoid using UVR tanning devices.

→ DOES SUNBED USE HELP THE BODY PRODUCE VITAMIN D?

Yes, but there is no need to use sunbeds to boost vitamin D levels, even in winter. Hands and face outdoor exposure for about 15 minutes a day, even in cloudy weather, combined with a balanced diet should provide for sufficient levels of vitamin D. If this proves to be deficient, dietary supplements can be taken.

→ ISN'T BUILDING UP A TAN BY USING SUNBEDS SAFER THAN RISKING SUNBURN?

It is necessary to avoid sunburn, which raises the risk of skin cancer. Scientific evidence does not support the idea that it is safe to 'build up' a tan. People can be over-exposed to UV through the use of sunbeds, just as they can be from the sun. Both sunbeds and sunlight can prompt the development of skin cancer and both accelerate photo aging. Going outdoors is beneficial, but even so, people are advised to avoid the sun in peak hours. If that is unavoidable, appropriate clothing, sunscreen and sunglasses need to be worn. Even occasional use elevates the risk of skin cancer, particularly if this exposure is before the age of 30.

→ WHAT IS THE CONCLUSION OF THIS OPINION?

The SCHEER concludes that:

- there is strong evidence that UV radiation from sunbeds causes several skin cancers (skin melanoma, squamous cell carcinoma and basal cell carcinoma), and may also cause ocular melanoma;
- there is no safe limit for exposure to UV radiation from sunbeds.

Consumers should be fully aware about the risks of using sunbeds for cosmetic purposes and in case their choice is to use them despite understanding the risks, they should take precautions. Those who are serious about protecting their health would be better off avoiding sunbeds altogether – especially if they are under the age of 30, have family history of melanoma or/and are fair or have freckles.

This factsheet is based on the Opinion of the independent Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER): "Biological effects of ultraviolet radiation relevant to health with particular reference to sunbeds for cosmetic purposes".
November, 2016

This opinion is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/scheer/opinions/index_en.htm

Health and Food Safety

FALSE: none of the studies referenced in the opinion support this assertion.

This is nothing new! The same as with the sun in the sky it is all about avoiding over-exposure.

People meeting these criteria should avoid the sun as well as sunbeds. This is undisputed. Any professional tanning salon will advise them not to tan and should refuse use.

FALSE: Risks related to irradiance cannot be dissociated from exposure time. All sunbeds include a time control system to ensure that the consumer only has the appropriate exposure, after which, the sunbed automatically switches off. Irradiance output is already regulated by EU mandatory standard (EN 60335-2-27) limiting the irradiance of sunbeds to 0.3 W/m², a level that corresponds to the mid-day, Mediterranean sun.

FALSE: The amount of sun you need to meet your vitamin D requirements varies hugely, depending on your location, your skin type, the time of year, the time of day, and even the atmospheric conditions. An 8.am-5.pm working day in a northern European country hardly allows for exposure to 15 minutes of sunlight anyway.

Contrary to sun exposure, responsible use of sunbeds avoids sunburn full stop. The device switches off at the end of the controlled dose of UV, unlike the sun.

No they can't if they do it in a professional tanning facility! Skin type is checked, time exposure is controlled and limited. There is no possibility of getting burned with a sunbed as long as you follow the recommendations of the operators or the notice of use when it's a private sunbed.